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An aberrant *Lamprotornis mevesii* with comments on the limits of the genus *Lamprotornis*

by R. K. Brooke

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The Instituto de Investigacao Cientifica de Angola in Sa da Bandeira has a female specimen (no. 27466) in moderately worn plumage of *Lamprotornis mevesii mevesii* (Wahlberg) collected by E. Pantes on 20th May 1969 at Cauaiala in the Huila district of Angola. It is entirely grey save for a slight purplish blue gloss, chiefly on the rectrices and remiges. The soft parts are nearly as dark as in normal birds. This aberrant specimen looks like a large, dark edition of *Cosmopsarus unicolor* Shelley of East Africa, though in that species the slight gloss on the remiges and rectrices is green, not bluish purple. Normal birds are highly iridescent blue and purple with a little bronze. The aberration is presumably due to a thickening of the translucent cells above the pigments, together with a reduction in the volume of melanin deposited. The thickening of the translucent cells would have the effect of reducing or eliminating the normal iridescence depending on the extent of the thickening.

If a simple genetic aberration can produce a bird looking like a member of another genus the question of the validity of separate genera arises. *Cosmopsarus* Reichenow 1879 with type species *C. regius* Reichenow is recognized by Amadon (1962), but White (1962) lumps it in *Spreo* Lesson 1831 with type species *S. bicolor* (Gmelin). But as pointed out by Clancey (1958) *Spreo* as constituted by either Amadon or White is a composite group. Shelley (1906) seems to regard the lack of dark undertail coverts in adults as the only generic character separating *Spreo* from *Lamprotornis* Temminck 1820 with type species *L. caudatus* (P. L. S. Mueller), and Amadon (1943) gives no very clear reason for recognizing *Spreo* except convenience. Benson (1959) recorded a male *L. chloropterus elizabeth* (Stresemann) in full breeding condition but with juvenile chestnut on the abdomen from Lochinvar in Zambia, and I have seen such birds in the early part of the breeding season in northern Rhodesia. These observations hardly suggest that we are dealing with a character of generic importance. Durrer & Villiger (1970) show that *Lamprotornis*, *Cosmopsarus* and *Spreo* have the same iridescence structure, and differ substantially therein from other genera of African starlings. By *Spreo* they mean *S. superbus* (Rueppell) and its relatives, not the restricted genus of Clancey (1958).

The similarities in plumage and structure at both macro and micro levels leads me to believe that two genera should be recognized: *Spreo* including *bicolor*, *albicapillus* Blyth and *fischeri* (Reichenow) as proposed by Clancey (1958), and *Lamprotornis* including the species placed therein by White (1962) and Amadon (1962), plus *hildebrandti* (Cabanis), *pulcher* (P. L. S. Mueller), *regius* (Reichenow), *shelleyi* Sharpe, *superbus* and *unicolor* (Shelley), and I propose accordingly.

I am obliged to Dr. da Rosa Pinto for facilities for study at Sa da Bandeira and for permission to discuss this aberrant specimen, to M. P. Stuart Irwin for criticizing a draft of this paper, and to K. Bardowicks for translating the critical parts of Durrer & Villiger (1970).

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Notes on some Ethiopian birds

by C. Erard and J. Prévost

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The following notes form part of the results of the expedition of the Laboratoire d'Ornithologie (Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris) to Ethiopia in 1968. We wish to thank I. C. J. Galbraith and D. J. Freeman, who gave Erard every assistance while he was working in the British Museum (Natural History), London; and C. W. Benson, who examined some material with him and assisted in the final drafting of this paper.

Tauraco leucotis (Rüppell)

The White-cheeked Turaco is a species endemic to the Ethiopian highlands, although its breeding area extends slightly beyond the political boundaries of Ethiopia into the south-eastern Sudan. Two races are generally recognised: the red-crested *T. l. donaldsoni* (Sharpe) in northern Harrar, Arussi and northern Bale; the black-crested *T. l. leucotis* (Rüppell) from south-western Arussi, Shoa and Sidamo westward to the Boma plateau in the south-eastern Sudan, and northward to Eritrea (now politically part of Ethiopia). Ticho in Arussi is the westernmost locality at present known for *donaldsoni*.

Although Moreau (1958: 108) has published a useful map of the distribution of *leucotis* and *donaldsoni* in eastern Ethiopia, information from the zone of contact between the two subspecies is still poor, with precise data from mountainous Arussi and especially from Bale between the Mendebo-Araenna mountains and Sidamo (headwaters of the Ganale Doria and the Uelmal) lacking.

The fact that in 1968 we found black-crested *leucotis* between Wadera and Zembaba, an apparently previously unknown locality where *T. leucotis* meets *T. ruspolii* (Salvadori) (see Erard & Prévost, 1970), suggests that the area between the Ganale Doria and the Uelmal is inhabited by what is usually called *T. l. leucotis*. We say "usually called" because our material, together with that in London and that which was already in Paris, shows an interesting geographical variation among the populations commonly designated as *T. l. leucotis*, to which attention does not seem to have been previously drawn.

Below is a list of the material by provinces attributable to the nominate race which we have examined. Only those specimens whose localities could be traced on maps are considered. "B.M." or "M.P." after the specimens indicates where they are deposited, respectively either in London or Paris.

Eritrea: 1♀, Anseba Valley, Aug. (B.M.).